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An Introduction to RUSSIAN MUSIC

MONTAGU NATHAN



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AN INTRODUCTION TO
RUSSIAN MUSIC

Works by the Same Author:

A HISTORY OF RUSSIAN MUSIC
GLINKA
MOUSSORGSKY
RIMSKY-KORSAKOF
CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN COMPOSERS
A HANDBOOK TO THE PIANO WORKS
OF SKRYABIN

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AN INTRODUCTION TO
RUSSIAN MUSIC

BY
MONTAGU-NATHAN

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PREFATORY

WHY WE SHOULD STUDY
RUSSIAN MUSIC

PEOPLE who are interesting themselves in Russian music are doing so for a variety of reasons. Some because other people are doing it; they have a very hazy notion as to why; they speak of it as "this" Russian music, as if it were a peculiar form of the tonal art, peculiar in the sense that the sounds that come from the æolian or the Jew's harp are peculiar, perhaps as if it were, so to say, music with a "sky" tacked on to the end of its name.

* * *

Others are interested for political reasons, recognising that as we have entered into an alliance with the Russians it is high time that we began to find out what sort of folk our allies really are, and these people are rapidly discovering—as Borodin prophesied they would—that the Russians are not the "eaters of tallow candles and polar bears" some of us once thought them.

* * *

But there is another class, and it is obviously the smallest, of students of Russian music. "There is no doubt," wrote Mr. Francis Toye, in the July, 1914, number of the *English Review*, "that we are in full revolt against German music . . ." Coming away from the Paris performance (in June, 1914) of Strauss' *Legend*

of Joseph, says M. Jean-Aubry in *La Musique Francaise d'aujourd'hui*, he remarked to a friend—and he has often since been reminded of it—"that here were the clearest symptoms of decadence." "But," writes Mr. Edwin Evans, in a review of the above-mentioned book, "I have apparently held longer than the author that the German tradition began to decline as German materialism gained the ascendant."

* * *

It will quickly become obvious to those who compare the recent music of Russia and of Prussia, that while the latter is in a decline, the former is in a particularly flourishing condition. The people who were studying Russian music long before the War and wondered why the British musical public persisted in ignoring all the great Russians excepting Tchaikovsky, knew that Debussy was saved from the great wave of Wagnerism that all but engulfed Europe in the 'eighties through his good fortune in learning of the existence of Moussorgsky's *Boris Godounof*; they knew that while there is much that is original in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, it is in many respects to be regarded as the grandchild of Dargomijsky's somewhat austere opera, *The Stone Guest*, welcomed by the Russian reformers as "the keystone of the

modern Russian opera"; they knew that in leading the French movement for the foundation of a national school upon native traditions, Debussy had not the intention of copying, but of emulating the Russians who had succeeded in achieving this for their own music.

It is because Russia has made a national music for herself, because she has contrived to endow Opera with a dignity that compels people to think of Opera as Drama, and not as a "Concert in costume," because her musicians have consistently preached nationalism not merely for themselves but for all nations, that we should study Russian music. We have much to learn from it, and, not least, *how to be ourselves*.

I.
THE FOUNDERS

GLINKA

WHEN in 1812 the Muscovites saw the army of Europe's enemy retreating from the smouldering ruins of their ancient city, Michael Ivanovich Glinka had already celebrated his eighth birthday, having been born on May 20th, 1804. He was hardly able at that time to realise the difference that had been made by this tremendous conflagration in the minds of his fellow-countrymen, but at a later date he saw clearly that the flames of Moscow had, as it were, illuminated the Empire, and that in their glare the Russian had caught a glimpse of his own soul. During Glinka's life he prepared a lamp whose flame should for ever throw a light upon this soul, and, 'ere he died, he had kindled it.

Early Training and Environment.

His early home life was favourable to the cultivation of a musical taste, for his uncle, who lived near, kept his own band, and the boy heard music of all kinds. But it was the folk-tunes they played that pleased him above everything, and what he afterwards achieved was largely due to their inspiration. When a child, he exclaimed to a teacher who could not understand his devotion : "Music is my soul." As a man he gave life to Russian music.

In 1817, he was taken to school in Petrograd, and his parents arranged that he should have good lessons on the piano and the violin, so that when his general education was finished and he entered the government service, his talents were already conspicuous, and he was made much of in musical circles. He found his official work tedious, but he made so many musical and artistic friends that his life, out of office hours, was highly congenial. In 1827 his father's fortune was suddenly increased, and, quitting the service, Glinka devoted himself entirely to music. There followed a perfect orgy of musical festivities in which he took a leading part, and the strain on his weak constitution was so severe that he was obliged to seek health in a warm climate. He spent the next three years (from 1830) in travelling about Italy, and it was towards the end of that time that, suffering from a surfeit of music that aroused no deep feelings within him, he experienced that sensation which in his diary he described as musical nostalgia, a desire to hear music that would minister to his racial sentiments and emotions. On his way home he stayed in Berlin and there took some lessons with the well-known teacher, Dehn, in musical theory. It was Dehn who challenged him to "go and write Russian music," and soon after this he wrote home to a

friend disclosing his resolve to compose an opera that would make his countrymen "feel at home" when they heard it.

National Opera.

On 27th November, 1836, this opera received its first performance, and Russian music began its wonderful and glorious career. *A Life for the Tsar* had delivered a message; it had given a music to Russia, a music which Russians themselves had created. "We," said Glinka, speaking for composers, "are but the arrangers."

The success of this work caused Glinka himself, as well as many other people, including the Tsar, to think of a further opera. When in Italy he had remarked that "our sad Russian songs are children of the North, with certain Oriental characteristics," and taking as his "plot," Pushkin's folk-poem, *Russlan and Ludmila*, he laid particular emphasis upon its oriental episodes by setting them to music of Eastern origin. Partly because Russians had not yet opened their hearts to their wonderful folk-lore, and partly because Glinka had succeeded even better than in *A Life for the Tsar* in ridding himself of the Italian mannerisms so dear to the conventional opera-goer of that day, *Russlan and Ludmila*, on its production on the sixth anniversary of that of the first opera,

was not so successful as its predecessor : its national colour was less obvious, but it only needed public enlightenment to make its full effect, and on musicians of the next and succeeding generations its influence has been incalculable.

Glinka, somewhat piqued at its moderate success, began once more to travel, and while in Spain perceived that the folk-songs of that country, like those of his own, were quite unknown to its people and even to its musicians. Making a collection of them, he wrote two Spanish orchestral pieces, and in this new form of short symphonic popular piece he composed his *Kamarinskaya* fantasia on two folk-songs heard at a Russian village wedding. He had now another project in view, and, for the purpose of tracing the connection between his native folk-song and the ancient ecclesiastical modes, he once more visited Dehn in Berlin. Meyerbeer, hearing of his presence there, arranged a concert in his honour, and it was on leaving the hall that Glinka contracted the chill which ended fatally on February 15th, 1857.

Glinka's Work for Russian Music.

Glinka is known as the Father of Russian Music. He founded a family of musical forms which may be briefly described as follows :—

Opera, in which a deeply patriotic historical text is set to music written as far as possible in the folk-style ; Opera, in which the fantastic or fairy element of Russian folk-lore is the primary characteristic, and in which the Eastern flavour, so conspicuous in Slavonic legend and art, is heightened by music which suggests the Orient ; Orchestral music in which the traditional symphonic mould is discarded for a shorter and more popular form, and of which the content is "national." Tchaikovsky described *Kamarinskaya* as "a source at which Russian composers will drink for long years to come."

What Glinka did for Spain will 'ere long become manifest, for the Spaniards are already beginning to show that his lesson has been well learned. Glinka is not only the father of Russian musical nationalism, but of universal nationalism in music.

II.
DARGOMIJSKY

ALEXANDER Sergeyevich Dargomijsky was born on 2nd February, 1813, in the government of Toula, whence his father, a well-to-do land-owner and civil servant had fled in the previous year from his country property at Smolensk, on the approach of Napoleon's army. Making, in 1817, a further change of domicile, the family settled in Petrograd, and, arriving in the capital, lost no time in arranging for the cultivation of the musical gifts the child had already shown himself to possess. "Already at the age of eleven or so," says Cheshikin, in *The Russian Opera*, "Dargomijsky played the violin and the piano (Glinka spoke of him as a very vigorous pianist), had made some attempts at composition and was taking lessons in singing."

Education and Early Works.

His general education was conducted at home, and when this was finished he secured an appointment in the Civil Service. Thus placed, he seems to have repeated the experiences of Glinka ; the work was uncongenial, but contact with highly placed government officials won him the *entrée* into the *salons* where his talents were valued. Through his répûte in these circles he became known in 1833 to Glinka, who showed him in which direction lay his duty towards

the musical art. Glinka also induced and assisted him to acquire a theoretical knowledge. Fortified by his study of the exercise books used by the composer of *A Life for the Tsar* when working with Dehn in Berlin, he proceeded to compose an opera on the subject of Hugo's *Notre Dame*,* performed after some years' delay at Moscow, in 1847. Dargomijsky, whose artistic judgment and power had in the meantime matured, describes the work as being in the style of Meyerbeer and Halévy, but, gratified by its popular success, he determined to try again. He accordingly dramatised a Cantata called *The Triumph of Bacchus*, offering it in its new shape as an opera-ballet to the Operatic Directorate: they refused to produce it, and it was shelved for some twenty years.

“ Russalka.”

From the end of 1843 until early in 1845, Dargomijsky was travelling abroad, meeting several famous musicians, among them the very men to whom he attributes the style of his successful opera. We do not read that he actually suffered from the musical nostalgia recorded in Glinka's diary, but on his return home he began, like the older composer, to write a national opera. Owing, however, to the discouraging

* Dargomijsky used the title, *Esmeralda*, given by Hugo to his own dramatic adaptation.

reception of his opera-ballet he only composed intermittently, preferring to occupy himself with some very fine songs, and it was not until 1853 that he resolved on completing it. *Rusalka*, as it was called, was not a great success with a public little inclined to be enthusiastic about an opera on a Russian folk-subject constructed on unfamiliar lines. But Dargomijsky had a better purpose than merely to court the approval of the contemporary public.

“The Stone Guest.”

On returning in 1865 from a second absence abroad, during which he had visited France, Germany, Belgium and England, he allied himself closely with the little band of reformers with whom, through Moussorgsky, he had previously made an acquaintance, and it was then that he began to occupy himself with that epoch-making work, *The Stone Guest*, hailed by the “Invincible Band” as the embodiment of the artistic principles which they had drawn up as their code. His health now began to fail, but thanks to the intense interest and understanding displayed by these friends he felt quite satisfied, when on his death-bed in January, 1869, in confiding its completion to them. The finishing touches were entrusted to Cui, the scoring to Rimsky-Korsakof.

Dargomijsky's Reforms in Opera.

Referring to Glinka's youthful avowal, "Music is my soul," Cheshikin avers that Dargomijsky might well have said that poetry was his. Perhaps it will be easier for students to obtain a clear notion as to the divergence in their ideals if we associate with Glinka the desire to cleanse Russian music of its foreign style and substance, and with Dargomijsky the firm intention of eradicating certain absurdities which had obtained sanction in dramatic music. While agreeing cordially with Glinka that native music ought to be Russian in flavour, he felt the necessity of making music, and especially opera, a more dignified form of art. When he chose for his motto, "The sound must represent the word," he meant that music written to a text ought to be appropriate to the words, but he had also in mind that closer connection between the music of an opera and its dramatic action which he sought to establish in *Russalka* and *The Stone Guest*. In a word, he refused to countenance that kind of opera which was obviously intended simply as a means of showing off the superb voices of the principal actors, and which consisted of a series of tuneful pieces. In *Russalka* he followed Glinka by adopting a folk-subject text written by the great national poet, Pushkin, but it was as a pioneer that he

set about the broadening of the melodic substance until it had the nature of a recitative, and thus a resemblance to real speech. A further innovation was the introduction of a pungent native humour (this is also to be found in his songs) which is as national a characteristic as that reflected by the pathetic heroism of *A Life for the Tsar*.

But in *The Stone Guest* he went ever so much further. As though to prove that music could ally itself on equal terms with drama and not merely as a species of ornamentation, he took Pushkin's "dramatic scenes" and set the text exactly as it stood to music, making no concessions to the public's weakness for melody nor to its willing disregard of dramatic verity. This was the opera that Cui called the "key-stone of modern Russian music," and it was *The Stone Guest* also, which, having proved a model for the form of Moussorgsky's *Boris Godounof*, influenced Debussy, through that work, to make a similar experiment in setting Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Thus while Glinka helped to revive the neglected folk-song both of Russia and of Spain, Dargomijsky caused opera to be cleansed and remodelled not only in his fatherland, but far beyond its confines.

III.
“THE FIVE”

BALAKIREF

MILY Alexeyevich Balakiref was born on 21st December, 1836, in Nijni-Novgorod about a month after the production of *A Life for the Tsar*. His musical education was of a rather casual kind. When four years of age he began to learn the piano from his mother, then for a short time he took lessons with a good teacher in Moscow, but soon returned home to prepare for entrance into the University of Kazan. During the period of these studies he occupied himself as seriously as they would allow with a self-education in music. Later on, becoming acquainted with Oulibishef, the biographer of Mozart, he was considerably helped by this well-known critic, who made the young man free of an exceptionally fine library at his country house, and allowed him to experiment with the private band which was there maintained. Finally Balakiref was introduced by him to Glinka, who entrusted him with the noble mission of carrying on the work begun with *A Life for the Tsar*.

“The Invincible Band.”

Acquaintance with César Cui very soon followed, and then it was that the two young men founded the little association known to historians as the “mighty little heap,” the “Invincible Band,” and (by the French) as “Les Cinq.”

Balakiref had a fine talent as a pianist, and this at once made him a *persona grata* in Petrograd musical circles. But it was his extraordinary knowledge of the classical musical literature which a phenomenal memory enabled him to quote at will, that earned the admiration and respect of the reformers grouped about him, and they were at first sufficiently cognisant of their own inferiority to submit to his ruling on all matters musical. As time went on, however and the members of the group "found their feet" as composers, they became disinclined to accept advice which often did violence to their individual temperaments, and eventually each member of the Band took his own path. Meanwhile Balakiref had begun to make a position for himself in Petrograd, and in his capacity as director of the concerts of both the Imperial Musical Society and the Free School of Music (which he had helped to found), he was able to further the prospects of the National School by including in his programmes the works composed by his four disciples. Although subscribing to the reformative operatic principles drawn up in consultation with Dargomijsky, Balakiref made only one attempt, which he soon abandoned, to apply them. But with his two orchestral works on Russian themes, his Oriental piano-fantasia,

Islamey, the symphonic poem, *Tamara*, and a number of very lyrical songs, he contributed in a remarkable measure to the perpetuation of the Glinkist tradition.

In 1874 his personality underwent a great change, partly due, it is said, to financial misfortune, and he became more or less of a spiritual recluse, being for some time lost to his friends. He reappeared in Petrograd in 1881 and once more took over the direction of the Free School. Two years later he was appointed chief of the Imperial Chapel and, together with Rimsky-Korsakof, his assistant, carried out some much needed reforms in the conduct of that institution, but in 1895 he once again disappeared from view and was only occasionally seen in Petrograd. His last visit to the capital was made shortly before his death in 1910, but the concert which he had hoped to give on that occasion had to be abandoned owing to lack of public support.

A Follower of Glinka.

Balakiref's labours in the cause of Russian Nationalism are not so easily identifiable with the precept of Glinka as are those of his contemporaries and colleagues Borodin, Moussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakof, because of his failure to write an opera. But apart altogether from

his administrative occupations, which show him to have been a true disciple, he contributed some works that in virtue of their quality form an important addition to the treasury of Russian national music. The symphonic poem, *Russia*, the overture on three Russian themes, and his collection of folk-songs, mark him out as a pioneer in the direction hinted at by Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*; the seed of the Oriental works, *Tamara* and the wonderful *Islamey*, may be said to have been sown in the Eastern music of *Russlan* and *Ludmilla*, while the theme of the Spanish overture, as well as the intention of celebrating the folk-music of Spain, came from the composer of the *Jota Aragonese* and *A Summer Night in Madrid*. As for his songs they owe much to the influence of Glinka and comparatively little to that of Dargomijsky.

IV.
C U I

AT the earliest point in the life-history (not yet complete) of César Antonovich Cui we find a link with the episode to which the awakening of Russian nationalistic sensibility is attributed. His father, a Frenchman, was left wounded, and thus escaped the horrors of the disastrous retreat of 1812, and having found work as a teacher of his native tongue, married and settled at Vilna, where our subject was born on 18th January, 1835. His parents chose for him a military career, and to judge from the distinction he has earned as an authority on the subject of fortification, there seems little reason to suppose that he had less vocation for soldiering than for music.

His Work for Russian Music.

The value of his labours as a musician lies in his capacity rather for precept than for practice. Having received very little tuition and being busily occupied in preparing for his military examinations, the development of his musical talent was deferred until the beginning of his association with Balakiref. It was then that his clear grasp of the question of operatic reform, his sympathy with the ideals of Dargomijsky, and his understanding of matters vocal, earned for him the respect of his musical comrades, and for a time he shared with Balakiref the

leadership of the Circle. But despite his fervid advocacy of the Glinkist and Dargomijskian principles, displayed in many a journalistic battle on behalf of the nationalist group and its propaganda, in his own compositions he has interpreted the doctrines somewhat elastically. A prolific composer, he has not yet produced anything worthy of a place among the masterpieces left by his fellow-workers in the cause of nationalism. And even the delightful satire with which his critical articles abound is very often quite misapplied.

His Operas.

His activities as an operatic composer show how loosely he has construed the canons to which he committed himself in his literary labours. His first opera, *The Mandarin's Son*, on a text by V. Krilof, owed much to Auber and something to Offenbach. Most of *The Captive of the Caucasus*, after Pushkin's youthful poem, was composed before the association with Dargomijsky had begun, but even the extra act, added in 1881, might well, in some particulars, have been written in defiance rather than in support of the approved principles. *William Ratcliff* is based on Heine's tragedy, but here, although Cui has observed the Dargomijskian code in the letter, the spirit of musical

interpretation is conspicuously lacking. In *Angelo*, derived from Hugo's drama, the composer, while more successful in this respect, transgresses against one of the vital tenets by interpolating a whole act for musical purposes. *The Saracen*, on a Dumas plot, earned him the soubriquet of the "Northern Bellini." *Le Flibustier* is a setting of Richepin's drama of Brittany, and was published and first performed in Paris. A French critic pronounced it to be as dull "as a London fog" while his compatriots marvelled at the adaptability of the mind that could reconcile the choice of a French wine when filling so Russian a vessel as the structural form of this work, which was closely modelled on *The Stone Guest*. They must have been equally surprised at the next essay, *Mlle. Fifi*, after de Maupassant's famous impeachment of Prussian brutality, which contains French folk-song and the *Wacht am Rhein*, and thus comes curiously from him who contemptuously styled Rubinstein "a Russian composer of music." In his last two operas Cui appears better to have realised his responsibilities and has returned to Pushkin, but his use in one instance of a plot derived by that poet from "Christopher North," and in the other of an adaptation of a prose tale, shows him still to be far less capable than Rimsky-Korsakof of

creating a work which abides by the new Russian tradition.

His musical gift is not of a kind that allows of the composition of a large work in which the sense of the text is faithfully reflected. He is essentially a miniaturist, and far from being a nationalist in practice, is as thorough a cosmopolitan as Saint-Saëns. He is to be seen at his best in some of his many songs and small piano pieces in which the defects of his operatic compositions become virtues.

V.
BORODIN

IN the career of Alexander Porfirievich Borodin, born in Petrograd on 31st October, 1834, we have a further example of that dual occupation already noted in reference to Cui. In pursuit of his calling of professor of chemistry and lecturer in medicine, his enthusiasm for the primary vocation was in no measure inferior to that of Cui, but his contribution to Russian musical literature is immensely superior. Although he was one of the first to repudiate the hard and fast code of *The Stone Guest*, the music he has left us is to be considered not only as showing his regard for the Glinkist tradition of lyricism and a humour of a kind which recalls the composer of *Russalka*, but as a wonderful manifestation of Oriental colouring that is to be traced not so much to a knowledge of *Russlan* and *Ludmilla* as to an Eastern ancestry.

Association with the Nationalists.

In Borodin's early musical tastes quite a different tendency was noticeable. He was a great lover of Mendelssohn, to whose chamber music he was probably attracted by his love of melody. But on his appointment as doctor in a military hospital he came across Mousorgsky, then an army officer, and this, leading to an acquaintance with Balakiref in 1862, resulted in his subsequent enthusiasm for the

nationalist cause. Balakiref, ignoring, as was his custom, the scientist's want of musical training (he was only a passable pianist and had but an amateurish command of both 'cello and flute) immediately advised him to write a symphony, while V. V. Stassof, the art critic, not yet aware of his aversion from Dargomyskian purism, proposed to him an operatic subject to be treated on the lines of *The Stone Guest*. He proceeded with the first, but soon abandoned the second and less congenial task.

"Prince Igor."

Borodin did not reveal his full power until some time later, when he addressed himself to the famous B minor symphony and the magnificent opera, *Prince Igor*. In the music of these we see reflected all the archaic pageantry and the heroic Eastern splendour of which Borodin had discovered the records when studying the literature of the period of *The Tale of Igor's Band*, an epic poem with a subject dating back to the twelfth century. The composition of the opera proceeded very slowly, owing partly to an embarrassing abundance of material collected during these preliminary studies, and partly to the composer's activity in other spheres. Borodin, one of the founders of the Petrograd Academy of Medicine for Women,

lectured regularly at this and other institutions, and spent a good deal of time in private research work. In consequence of this over-crowded life he only had leisure to compose when unwell, and, strange as it may seem, he was often better inspired when indisposed than when in good health. In the end, *Prince Igor* was left unfinished. On Borodin's death in 1887 the task of collecting and arranging the profusion of material, much of it familiar, fell on the shoulders of Rimsky-Korsakof and Glazounof, the latter writing out the overture from memory. It was received, when first performed in 1890, with the greatest enthusiasm, as a truly Russian document.

Borodin's reputation rests on his opera, his second symphony, his second quartet and some superb songs, some of which were known and admired in England long before his authorship of an opera was suspected. Among the many friends he made when on his extended pilgrimages to Western Europe none was more enthusiastic than Liszt, of whom there is a fine word portrait to be found in the letters of Borodin to his wife.

The Opera of an Optimist.

Prince Igor is considered in Russia to be, in a sense, the modern parallel to Glinka's *Russlan*

and Ludmilla. It has, however, certain features in common with the music dramas of Moussorgsky, such as the prominence of the chorus, and the inclusion of the two clownish characters. But the general impression gained from a hearing of the work is that of the cheerfulness of the music designed to reflect the optimism of the protagonists when faced with misfortune. Borodin, himself an optimist and none the less a Russian, has given us a fresh and very welcome view of the national character.

VI.
MOUSSORGSKY

MODESTE Petrovich Moussorgsky, more than any of the composers with whom his name is linked, was the child of his age. He began his life on March 16th, 1839, just about twenty years before the great act of Emancipation by which millions of serfs were liberated in 1861, and ended it on his forty-second birthday, twenty years after that event. His personality and outlook on life were tremendously affected by the social changes taking place around him and, beginning as a youth desirous of employing an unusual talent for the piano and a pleasant voice as a means of commanding himself to society, he resolved, in early manhood, to demonstrate that music was not intended to be a self-sufficient art, but a vehicle of human intercourse. In this view he was encouraged by Dargomijsky, to whom he was introduced by a brother officer in the Preobajensky, or "crack" regiment of Guards. And he was so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his mission that he resigned from the army and faced financial stress rather than abandon it.

Inspiration of Folk Music.

With Dargomijsky's creed, which he interpreted as "the truth whatever it may cost," he, of all the "Five," was most in sympathy,

and not long after *The Stone Guest* was put before Balakiref's circle he began *The Matchmaker*, a work of similar kind. But his allegiance to Glinka was strengthened by the folk-tales he had heard, as had Pushkin and many another Russian, from his nurse, and in his great national opera, *Boris Godounof*, we find him inspired not only by a historical subject hardly less significant than that of *A Life for the Tsar*, but also by a deep appreciation of the poetry inherent in popular legend and song. In *Khovanshchina*, an equally famous work, he pays a further tribute to his precursors; its plot deeply concerns the annals of "Holy Russia," its music contains more than one example of genuine folk-song and many pages in which its spirit is reflected, while in structural form it is much indebted to the Dargomijskian model.

Truth in Music.

But apart from the qualities which prove him to be so worthy a disciple of his two great predecessors he is to be credited with a profound insight into the real nature of music itself, and it was as a seer in a region in which others had been blind that he insisted on a free path for musical progress. Musicians, he protested, must not base their art on the laws of the past, but on the needs of the future. The surviving

music of the past began as the music of the future.

With these views is often connected Mousorgsky's apparent indifference to theoretical study. But recently published documents prove that if he was not practically proficient in technical matters he at least understood them and felt that his aloofness would enable him to compose as he felt—unhampered by the traditions which become second nature to the schooled musician.

His views were by no means congenial to his friends, and through this divergence, as well as their disapproval of his rather wild mode of life, they became little by little estranged. But on his death, due to sheer physical decay, they rallied round him and arranged for the completion of the unfinished works, many of which have since been published.

In none of his compositions can his development more clearly be traced, his life-story better be told, than in his songs. Some earlier specimens such as the *Hopak* show him as a melodist ; with the growing desire for "the truth" we see him representing, as in *Savishna*, not only the word, but the tone of voice in his music. In the *Nursery* cycle of child-scenes he reflects even gesture. During the period of Cui's warfare with the opponents of nationalism and

progress he revealed himself to be a satirist, and in the *Classicist* and the *Peepshow* is to be found a biting sarcasm which depends very much for its point upon their musical material. And finally, when the premature end seemed to be rapidly approaching, he was impelled by the realisation of his destiny to write the two cycles, *Without Sunlight* and the *Songs and Dances of Death*, which contain all the poetic feeling, human sympathy and artistic sincerity engendered by his experience of life and inspired by his profound genius.

VII.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOF

NICHOLAS Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakof was born at Tikhvin on March 6th, 1844, and came of a stock that was accustomed to give its scions to the naval and military service of its country. Thus the man who was destined to consolidate the traditions founded by Glinka and Dargomijsky and handed on by Balakiref to his disciples, and moreover, to perpetuate that tradition by training the musical minds of a later generation, began his career as a naval cadet who was interested in music, and though very little versed in it preferred *Russlan and Ludmilla* to the works which found favour in his social circle.

A Sailor Musician.

His position in Balakiref's group was altogether that of a pupil, for he had neither instrumental talent nor theoretical knowledge. And soon after his first appearance at their meetings he was obliged to leave Russia on a three years' naval cruise. Despite these disabilities, however, he had begun, on Balakiref's advice, to write a symphony, to which during the cruise he made some additions, and on his return to Russia, becoming more and more attracted by the musical life, finally abandoned his naval career. Later on, when offered a

position (on the strength of his symphony and the orchestral work, *Antar*, which displayed an intuitive grasp of essentials at which he never ceased to marvel) as professor at Petrograd Conservatoire, he made, after some hesitation, the double resolve to accept, and *to prepare himself* for the post ! He felt himself to be a complete ignoramus, and, beginning by stealthily gathering information from his pupils, prosecuted his studies so assiduously as to become one of the finest musicians, in the scholastic sense, in Russia.

Rimsky-Korsakof as Opera Writer.

But his activities as conductor, teacher and administrator do not by any means overshadow his creative achievements. As the composer of fifteen operas in which there is stored a wealth of historical, legendary and spiritual material, and by means of which he has created a distinct type of opera based upon a fusion of styles, each of them having associations with the Russian tradition, by his wonderful symphonic pictures of the barbaric East, and by such works as the *Serbian Fantasia* and the *Spanish Caprice*, he has earned the right to be considered a composer in whose music all the streams of Russian musical nationalism unite in one mighty current.

Rimsky-Korsakof and Glazounof.

One of the first of the many pupils who have won distinction for themselves and thus added to their master's fame was Glazounof. The intimacy between them was the beginning of a new chapter in Russian musical history, one which opens a story in no wise inferior in interest to that of the "Invincible Band." Through Glazounof's supporter, Belayef, retired timber merchant and altruistic publisher, Rimsky-Korsakof was enabled to establish a new circle to replace that which Balakiref's retirement had rendered moribund, and in the early 'eighties he found himself in the position of a musical statesman, a privilege he never abused.

It may safely be said that while the understanding, so earnestly desired between Britain and Russia, has been greatly helped by our knowledge of those operas which have proved our previous estimate of the Slav character to be false, we shall never appreciate the beauties of Russian legendary lore and the measure of their appeal to the Slav, until such operas as *Sadko*, *The Snow-Maiden*, *Kashchei*, *Tsar Saltan*, and *Kitej* have been made familiar to us. Only then shall we see how inextricably can music become bound up with the social life of a people, how opera can be elevated to a form of worship,

and lastly how thoroughly and yet with what subtlety music may be permeated with a nationalistic sentiment.

Rimsky-Korsakof's death, in 1908, left a gap in the Russian musical world which has yet to be filled.

VIII.

THE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENT

SEROF, TCHAIKOVSKY, THE RUBINSTEINS,
TANEYEF AND GLAZOUNOF

IT is natural that the latter-day historians of Western Europe, whose main desire has been that of establishing the Nationalist Group in its rightful position, or, perhaps one should say, to proclaim its existence, should have said much less about the opposing body of musicians than would have been told had both sections of Russian musical society been discovered by us simultaneously. The names of Anton Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky were famous the world over long before those of the nationalists were known even to the few who sought a wider acquaintance with the Russian School. It is not long since the Russians themselves were quite content to rest on the laurels gained by these two men, and it is only of recent years that the work of the "mighty little heap" has received the honour due, but nearly always denied, to prescience. "When I proclaimed to them the truth," says Lermontof's prophet, "my neighbours furiously stoned me."

The nationalists were centred in Petrograd—a name which, by the way, they frequently used in preference to Peter's now for ever discarded German appellation. But in the new, as well as in Moscow, the old capital, there were musicians who did not at first look with favour upon

these attempts to establish a tradition of nationalism in Russian music.

The first opposition came from Serof (1820-1871), who had begun as a warm admirer of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, had then succumbed to the almost universal influence of Wagner, and who, after becoming more friendly to the nationalists whom he had formerly attacked with an ardour bordering on ferocity, set about writing an opera in which he proposed to apply the Wagnerian principle to music based on folk material interpreted in a Russian text. The position of Serof in Russian musical affairs at this time was, however, one of isolation. He, as has been hinted, was not in close sympathy with the nationalists, and as an advocate of Wagner he came too early to win many adherents to the cause of the mighty Teuton's music.

Opposition of the Conservatoires.

The really organised opposition to the "Five" and their supporters (Stassof, the art critic, being the doughtiest) came from the conservatoires in Petrograd and Moscow. Over the former ruled Anton Rubinstein, who had founded it in 1862, while his brother Nicholas presided at the conservatoire in Moscow. In the earliest days of the first institution there came within its portals two students who were

destined to wield a considerable influence over Russian musical society. The first, Hermann Laroche, composed little, but became a celebrated lecturer and writer, and was one of the first to proclaim the merits of the second, who was Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky. The latter eventually migrated to Moscow, where he joined forces with Nicholas Rubinstein, upholding there a tradition of sound musicianship and of adherence to the methods of musical speech prevailing in Western Europe. Meanwhile Balakiref and his nationalist associates in the new capital had founded the Free School of Music, and had also contrived to secure a footing in the conservatoire, to the staff of which Rimsky-Korsakof was appointed in 1871, and Balakiref had succeeded Anton Rubinstein as conductor of the Imperial Russian Musical Society. For a time there was between these rival groups a bitter warfare. For the nationalists, Stassof and Cui, fought with the utmost vigour. Against them were Laroche, Famintsin, Solovief and others whose names are to be found in Moussorgsky's *Peep-show*, a work in which the situation is admirably reproduced.

It is perhaps unnecessary to mention that as usual there was a certain amount of right on both sides. Musical Russia needed the nationalist campaign just as badly as it had needed a some-

what similar movement in Literature, instituted at the turn of the century by Pushkin. But if we trace to its root the present splendid musicianship displayed by the rising generation, we shall find ourselves obliged to admit that but for the Petrograd and Moscow conservatoires and their steady resolve to cultivate musical technique in all its branches (a study to which a special impetus was given by the desire to discredit the "dilettantism" of the nationalists) Russian music would to-day be in a very different condition.

On the other hand the nationalistic ideal influenced in no small degree those who displayed so inimical an attitude towards it. Anton Rubinstein was brought to recognise its value partly by the respectful attention paid by the public to *Boris Godounof*, but he was not himself altogether successful as a composer of national opera. Tchaikovsky admitted that "even" the nationalists had exerted some influence on his operatic style, and it has been shown by the correspondence published since his death how greatly he was indebted to Balakiref for artistic advice.

A Double Victory.

Little by little, then, the battle died down, and it ended in victory for both sides, and

consequently, for Russian music. The nationalist ideal gained a greater measure of acceptance, and Rimsky-Korsakof silenced the jibes against dilettantism by becoming a first-rate musician. Glazounof, his successor as chief at the Petrograd Conservatoire, and for some time associated with the nationalist group, inaugurated there a fresh tradition of technique and of a reverence for classicism which is far less characteristic of the Moscow School than once it was. Here, since the retirement of Taneyef (who was much influenced by Laroche, N. Rubinstein, and Tchaikovsky, but whose music has far less modern colouring than the latter's), and the death of Arensky, who, unlike Taneyef, could not countenance individuality in his pupils, the Conservatoire has become associated with a many-hued progressiveness, while in Petrograd there is once more a group of young men who are in active dissent from the conservative attitude maintained by Glazounof.

The connecting links between the old régime and the new age in Russian music are Rimsky-Korsakof and Taneyef. Each, as the director of a great Conservatoire, has left behind him a number of pupils who have already proved that the glory of Russian music is not waning. With the achievements and aspirations of these pupils it is now proposed to deal.

IX.
THE NEW AGE

SKRYABIN, RAKHMANINOF, TCHEREPNIN, REBIKOF, MEDTNER,
GNIESSIN, PROXOFIEF AND MYASKOVSKY

THE history of Russia's musical past possesses such clearly defined features, groups itself so conveniently, and falls so definitely into epochs, that the compiling of its record presents no difficulties. Turning to the present, however, and scanning the names of those whose achievements, though in some cases slender as to quantity, stamp them as belonging to the future as well as to our own time, one is amazed at the variety of aim evinced by the several distinguished creative artists who form the present movement in Russian music. One attempts to divide them according to their scholastic origins, and, as a result, the names of Rakhmaninof and Skryabin, or of Stravinsky and Steinberg claim a juxtaposition which might well be designed as a symbol of superlative incongruity. To seek any other means of classification is well-nigh futile since almost every worthy Russian composer of the day has a style of his own, and were we to couple the names of Rakhmaninof and Glazounof as representing the Old Guard that refuses to surrender but succeeds nevertheless in flourishing mightily, there would then have to be explained that their creative ideals have apparently little in common.

Rakhmaninof.

There would be little need to say more of so well-known a composer as Rakhmaninof, whose style may be described as that of a romanticist with a harmonic manner affording few surprises, were it not that in the last few years he has signified his approval, in unexpected fashion, of the aims of Dargomijsky's apostles. His little known, though occasionally performed one-act opera *The Niggardly Knight*, written to one of the series of three Pushkin playlets of which *The Stone Guest* is the first, is a work which proves that if the tree of Russian operatic reform has not flourished to the extent one would desire, its roots have travelled far underground. *The Niggardly Knight* testifies to unseen depths in the well of Rakhmaninof's creative power, and it is said that no one welcomes the light that has been shed thereon more than the composer himself.

Older Composers of To-day.

Among the senior composers to be discovered in the heterogeneous ranks of the present day Russian School there are one or two men who recall the *fin-de-siècle* exchange of political, social and artistic ideas between France and Russia. Of these may be mentioned Sergei Vassilenko, who, in addition to material in

which there is an occasional reference to the history, legend and literature of his own country, has given us music containing something more than a hint of French impressionism ; Tcherepnin, famous with us for his ballets, also provides an instance of similar influence, and in his last work for the theatre, a Choreodrama on the subject of Edgar Allan Poe's *Masque of the Red Death*, shows that he has an abiding sympathy with the countrymen of Baudelaire, the American poet's French translator. A sojourn in Paris may account for Balakiref's protégé, Akimenko's harmonic manner, their origins for that of the adoptive Muscovite, Catoire, and Taneyef's pupil, Glière. Grechaninof, an alumnus of both the Moscow and Petrograd schools, is at his best in his songs ; his style, originally falling between orthodoxy and a cautious progressiveness, seems of late to incline in the latter direction.

Skryabin and Rebikof.

Skryabin and Rebikof are two composers of equal notoriety but of very different merit. The life record and the story of the former's artistic development and spiritual evolution form one of the oddest pages in musical history. There is much yet to be told about the composer of *Prometheus*, and only when that is known

will his art be fully appreciated. He will be called by some a visionary ; but that he was an inspired artist and a superb musician, whose work bears witness to the magnificent training he received at Taneyef's hands—providing many examples of the facility with which he gave musical expression to his philosophical ideas—none who study his art and the ideology it represents will doubt. Skryabin belongs, in the chronological sense, to a period closing in 1915 with his death, but his music belongs as much as any living Russian composer's to the future.

In Rebikof we have a seeker, one who, while proclaiming his conviction that music, "the language of the emotions," must not be fettered by considerations of form, hardly ever refrains, when coming upon a fresh musical thought, from bestowing upon it a theoretical designation. His advocates claim for him the original discovery of a number of fresh musical ideas which—erroneously, they say—have been associated with other composers. The truth appears to be that whereas other composers have found spontaneous expression, by means of these musical concepts, for an original emotion, the plagiarised Rebikof's novel chords are apparently the product of an arduous search. His piano pieces are valuable as studies in modern harmony ; his dramatic works are curiously

unsatisfying in view of their pretensions to psychological exposition.

Medtner.

Medtner, one of the most earnest musicians in Russia, and one whose output is the most limited in point of variety, stands, as to creative style, quite alone. His early piano music recalled in more than one respect the manner of Brahms, the difference between the two being that Medtner possesses in considerable measure the power, denied to the German by Hugo Wolf, of "exulting." Of late, Medtner, though working on orthodox lines, has shown that while so doing it is possible to invest music with modern feeling. A comparison of his work with that of Rakhmaninof, who was educated in the same conservatoire, reveals a highly instructive contrast.

In the attempted classification of the above composers the word "nationalism" has not occurred, but it is now required in order that the art of Igor Stravinsky may be described. Among the nationalistic documents already issued by him are his ballets *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, and from occasional messages reaching these shores from the once voluntarily sought foreign habitation, now become enforced owing to the devastation

of his Russian estate, one learns that the list is increasing. Stravinsky provides the sole living instance among Glinka's numerous progeny of a composer whose artistic countenance resembles in feature that of the "Father of Russian music." From the creator of *Russlan and Ludmilla* he inherits the general tendency of his work, from Rimsky-Korsakof, one of the second generation, his technical verge in the direction of a refined and specialised orchestra, from Moussorgsky his laconicism and his aversion from the obvious. Three other disciples of Korsakof who have distinguished themselves in dramatic music, but especially in song, are his son-in-law Maximilian Steinberg, Michael Gniessin and Vladimir Senilof.

The New-Comers.

There remain to be mentioned a few composers whose appearance on the Russian musical horizon is of comparatively recent date. Here again we are confronted with a complete diversity of style. The poetic content of the music of Nicholas Myaskovsky, the composer of three symphonies, a fine piano sonata and some choice songs, is subjective and somewhat highly charged with emotion; Sergei Prokofief, like Stravinsky, with whom he is sometimes compared, is more impersonal; a brilliant pianist,

he has written a number of pieces for his instrument, and two sonatas, but it is in respect of some daring symphonic and dramatic examples that the above-mentioned comparison has been instituted. Alexis Krein, a progressive, is somewhat hampered by want of training ; his French sympathies are shared in a degree by his brother Gregory. Evgenie Gunst and Leonid Sabaneyef are both followers and exponents of Skryabin ; the former has done much to popularise, the latter to explain the later works.

As this chapter has almost declined into a list it may be concluded by a mere mention of two musicians who with the best, and most zealously progressive intentions, have so far succeeded only in scoring a kind of *succès de scandale* ; Oboukhof is desirous of establishing a system of notation wherein the long-enslaved semitonal degrees are to be enfranchised and given independent designations ; Nicholas Roslavets decorates the covers of his songs, piano pieces and violin sonata with Cubist drawings that appear to be an appropriate enough introduction to the fanciful material they enclose.

It is because present-day Russian music is sufficiently varied in tendency and aim to represent the tonal art of a continent, that the above commentary falls far short of completion, even as a list.

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